

TESTIMONY/STATEMENT OF MICHAEL STEPHENS ON THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – FEBRUARY 23, 2011

Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Michael Stephens and my life changed dramatically on June 5, 2006. All I was trying to do on June 5, 2006 was to work an honest day to support my family. I had worked at United Parcel Service for eight years as a package car driver and made a pretty good living. I was able to support a family of five including my wife Roberta and three children Ryan, Erin and Megan. Everything changed on June 5, 2006. All I did was lift a package off a shelf in my UPS truck as I had done so many times before. No one is to blame, there is no finger of fault to point – all I was doing was my job. But this day was different; this particular package I lifted turned my life upside down. You see, when I lifted that 5-foot cylinder package on June 5, 2006 little did I know I sustained an injury that would result in a fusion surgery to my neck that would ultimately take me out of the job I had come to rely on to support my family. Sure I felt the pain immediately when I lifted the package, but I thought, hoped and prayed it would simply get better. It did not.

After months of treatment, physical therapy and appointments with my doctors, I was faced with the only option that offered hope to relieve my pain and get me back to work, a fusion surgery to my neck. Surgery was performed on July 12, 2007 and, although the surgery did relieve some of the pain in my neck, I was ultimately informed by my doctor I would not be able to return to the job I had relied upon to support my family. I had sustained an injury that altered my career and my life. At age 43, with a family to support, where was I to go? My faith kept me strong and encouraged me but the outlook was very dim. My attorney discussed with me what was ultimately to become a light at the end of what appeared to be a very dark tunnel – a program designed to help those who were injured at work and whose injury was so serious that it kept them from returning to their job – a program called the Workers' Rehabilitation Services offered through the State of Connecticut Workers' Compensation Commission. A glimmer of hope!

I enrolled in the program and was ultimately enrolled at Naugatuck Valley Community College that was paid for through the Workers' Rehabilitation Services. I'm not saying it was easy but I did it – I changed my career. I graduated in December of 2009 with a degree in Human Services/Social Work and I am very proud to say I started a new job in a new career in January of 2010 at a residential care facility as a child developmental specialist. Unfortunately, my neck injury has worsened since then which ultimately resulted in a second neck surgery on July 19, 2010. Without the benefits offered to me through the Connecticut Workers' Compensation system, I cannot imagine the devastation that my injury of June 5, 2006 would have had on me and my family. Again, I'm not saying everything has been great since June 5, 2006 – quite to the contrary my life has in many ways been turned upside down. While it's hard to imagine it being worse, I know it would have been much so without the workers'

compensation benefits I have received and the hope offered to me by the Workers' Rehabilitation Services program. Mine is only one of countless similar stories – but this one is about me and my family. All I was trying to do on June 5, 2006 was to do my job and support my family. That is all most good, descent and hard-working people are doing when they are hurt on the job. Please do not take away or diminish any of the benefits that those people have to turn to when they have injuries like mine, and families to support like mine. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully and Sincerely Submitted,

Michael Stephens